

Sleepover Guidelines That All Parents Should Know

Keep these important tips in mind for your kid's next sleepover

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The sleepover is one of the most beloved experiences of childhood – remember the slumber party from “Grease”? Watching it as an adult, that iconic scene looks a lot like bullying. Sleepovers can be among childhood’s best and worst memories. And the same thing that makes them exciting for kids – being away from home for a whole night – makes them scary for parents. There’s not much we can do after dropoff to make sure they have a good time. But preparation and good timing can improve the odds of a sleepover becoming a night to remember for all of the right reasons.

The right age for your kid

There is no universal perfect age for a first sleepover. As with all major milestones, the right time is when your child is ready. Some toddlers routinely sleep over at a friend's house, while some tweens aren't ready yet. The context of the sleepover can be the deciding factor for a child who is on the fence. A sleepover with a best friend at a house where your child plays regularly is much less challenging than a big slumber party for a random classmate's birthday.

If your child gets an invite to a sleepover, ask them if they want to go. An enthusiastic response is no guarantee that reality will live up to expectations. But you might be surprised at how well your kid knows their own boundaries. If they want to go but feel anxious (actually, even if they aren't anxious), take time to talk through what to expect before deciding.

Set expectations

Nervousness or other issues such as sleepwalking or bedwetting do not necessarily preclude sleepover attendance. But you should give the hosting adult a heads-up to make sure they are prepared and willing to handle it. And talk to your child about what to do if those issues come up during the sleepover – for them or another child at the sleepover. Setting clear [boundaries and expectations](https://www.parentmap.com/article/how-we-make-dreaded-sleepovers-work-our-family) (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/how-we-make-dreaded-sleepovers-work-our-family>) with both your own kid and the hosting parents is critical to making sleepovers work.

For kids (and parents) who like the idea of a sleepover but are too anxious, hosting may be a more comfortable option for their sleepover debut. And if your child is still afraid after learning all of the details – no problem. There will always be another chance later.

Ask questions

It's easy to focus on social anxieties and forget that different families may not have the same attitudes about safety that you do. It can feel awkward to [ask questions](https://www.parentmap.com/article/five-easy-questions-what-you-should-ask-before-the-sleepover) (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/five-easy-questions-what-you-should-ask-before-the-sleepover>) before a sleepover, but it is your responsibility to know who will be playing with your child and who will be watching them. You should also find out what activities are planned and [if there are guns](https://www.parentmap.com/article/just-ask-campaign) (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/just-ask-campaign>) in the home where your child will be staying. A parent who is offended by these questions is probably not one you want watching your child overnight.

Have an exit strategy

Sleepovers are a rite of passage, but they shouldn't be an ordeal. There's no need to power through if a child gets scared or homesick at bedtime; or if the group chemistry is off and a child feels left out, or doesn't want to play the game they don't like (or know you wouldn't). Make sure that both your child and the hosting parents know that you don't mind picking your kid up at any time, for any reason. Having an exit strategy is especially important if your child has never been to a sleepover before or it's a new group of friends. Sometimes just knowing they have the option to go home makes it easier to stay until morning.

Plan accordingly for the next day

If all goes well, your child will have a blast with their friends. They will watch movies, eat too many snacks and play silly games until long after they normally would be in bed. They will come home happy — and exhausted. Sleepovers rarely involve a good night's sleep. [Plan for sleeplessness \(https://www.parentmap.com/article/what-do-when-your-kid-sleepover-party-animal\)](https://www.parentmap.com/article/what-do-when-your-kid-sleepover-party-animal), and don't build conflict into your schedule. If your child has an important soccer game on Saturday, don't send them to a sleepover on Friday. Similarly, if you're committed to a sleepover, don't plan a big family outing the next day. Everyone needs recovery time after a big event, and kids are no exception. Expect them to be a little tired and cranky after their big night out, and let them take it easy the next day.

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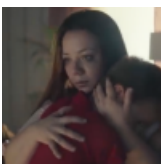
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